

Help put “injury” prevention and care into healthcare reform

One of the top political issues currently being addressed by the new political administration in the USA is healthcare reform. In a recent White House Forum on Health Reform, President Barack Obama identified healthcare reform as both a moral and fiscal imperative, and stated: “We can agree that if we want to bring down skyrocketing costs, we’ll need to modernize our system and invest in *prevention*.”¹

The health reform effort is moving quickly under the leadership of Senator Ted Kennedy, with the prevention component led by Senator Tom Harkin. Senator Harkin has been an ardent supporter of public health through more than two decades of service in the Senate and has pledged his full support to the prevention component of healthcare reform. At a recent hearing he stated: “This is going to be an extraordinarily important component of any reform legislation, because we will never get health care costs under control unless we place a major new emphasis on public health and prevention, while strengthening America’s public health system.”² Investment in prevention should focus not only on current cost effective practices, but also on research that will lead to innovations in the care and prevention of injuries for our citizens.

Why does this matter to professionals in violence and injury prevention and care? Primarily because this investment will help promote better health, improve quality of care, reduce the burden on our trauma and urgent care systems, and help control growing healthcare costs. Most importantly, it will contribute to a society where people can live to their full potential, a message that speaks to everyone.

The US Department of Health and Human Services includes in its Health Reform Quiz the question: “Which is longer, the average wait in a hospital emergency room or a feature-length film?” The answer, which is no surprise to those of us in this field, is the average wait in the emergency department, of which a large proportion is for traumatic injuries.^{3,4} The Institute of Medicine has reported that a brewing national crisis exists in our emergency care system.⁵ As stated in a recent STIPDA white paper on health reform: “Efforts to reform the United States health system must address injuries and violence to help ensure the public’s health and safety, as well as reduce long-term health care costs.”⁶

Through research and its applications, significant advances have led to reductions in injury incidence and improved recovery. Yet, the burden of injuries remains a major health issue for individuals, their families and our society. While we are all aware of this burden of injuries, the general public and our legislators remain largely uninformed about the toll of injuries on health as well as the potential for proven injury prevention measures and the role of injury research to reduce healthcare costs and improve the nation’s health. What can you do?

► Take a minute to voice your opinion and experience about the potential for injury prevention and care research and

programmes to improve health and reduce healthcare costs. Injury prevention and care research is critical to develop evidence-based preventive strategies and services that can prevent injury, contribute to reducing health costs, and make a healthier and safer America. You can voice your opinion through your legislator and/or through the US Government Health Reform website:

<http://www.healthreform.gov/contact/index.html>.

- Inform others in professional organisations to which you belong that injury must be included in the debate on health reform.
- When you talk to the public and policy makers, consider using the phrase “We want a society where people can live to their full potential.” This broad message is part of a new effort by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to provide a consistent voice to build the social and political will needed to save lives and reduce injuries.⁷ This message was designed through formative research with the public to change public perceptions about health by using a value that all can embrace.

SAVIR encourages all violence and injury professionals to follow and engage in this debate—an unprecedented opportunity for progress in improving health and wellness.

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